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SUBJECT: WASIT: SUWERAH SHAYKH ON RECONSTRUCTION, ELECTIONS, AND SADRISTS

CLASSIFIED BY: Alfred Fonteneau, Regional Coordinator, REO Hillah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Prince Sa'ad Mizher Al-Sumarmed, a prominent tribal figure in the Suwerah area of Northwest Wasit, predicted an increase in Sadrists influence when provincial elections are held after the formation of the national government in Baghdad. Without U.S. backing and security guarantees, Al-Sumarmed asserted, secular groups would face a very difficult road in upcoming provincial elections. Al-Sumarmed also accused the Wasit provincial government in Al-Kut of bias against the Northern region of the province when allocating resources. Al-Sumarmed was skeptical of efforts by the central government in Baghdad to reach out to tribal heads in the region, asserting that most tribal leaders were more interested in securing their share of money and projects from the provincial government and did not share a common interest in the security of the province as a whole. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Al-Sumarmed, a close relative of former Iraqi National Accord TNA member Shaykh Ma'ad Al-Sumarmed and a longtime supporter of the U.S. and Coalition presence in the province, said that he had declined an invitation from Interior Minister Bayan Jabr to a meeting of prominent tribal representatives in Baghdad. Al-Sumarmed felt that tribal heads in Wasit would not be able to ensure security in the region, as they were too focused on gaining the favor of the national and provincial governments.

PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS: EXPECT STRONG SADRIST PERFORMANCE

¶3. (C) Al-Sumarmed expected a strong performance by Sadrists candidates in provincial elections, regardless of when they are held. He asserted that the Sadrists had gained strength in the Suwerah area over the past year, and were much more assertive and willing to use violence than before. The mayor of Suwerah, according to Al-Sumarmed, now openly supports the Sadrists, where previously he has been neutral.

¶4. (C) Violent intimidation, plus the tendency of rural Shi'a voters to listen exclusively to the advice of religious authorities, presents almost insurmountable challenges to secular groups in Northern and Northwest Wasit, Al-Sumarmed said. Only with U.S. support and security guarantees, would secular parties be able to gain support. In his opinion, a rapid withdrawal of Coalition Forces from Iraq would lead to civil war.

5.(C) Al-Sumarmed complained vigorously of bias against Northwestern Wasit. Suwerah, he asserted, as the largest town in

the area, suffers because of its mixed Sunni-Shi'a population and its proximity to Baghdad. The Provincial Council (PC) in Al-Kut largely ignores the area when planning its reconstruction budget, and the city has no representation on the PC. NOTE. Al-Sumarmed is also involved in the construction business, and he has repeatedly complained to REO staff about difficulties in securing contracts. END NOTE.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. Al-Sumarmed's comments, particularly the call for U.S. support, are telling indicators of the challenges that secular groups face in Wasit. Al-Sumarmed's open support for U.S. and Coalition forces has further served to marginalize him amongst Wasit tribal leaders. His complaints about the relationship between Suwera and the provincial capital in Al-Kut, however, accurately reflect the dominance of the overwhelmingly Shi'a south of the province over the mixed Sunni-Shi'a areas bordering on Baghdad. COMMENT.

FONTENEAU